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From the Ashes



Cassy Fiano
Community Columnist

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

Notes from Afghanistan

Cassy Fiano

Ted Janicki is somewhat of a rarity.

In today's leftist-dominated world of academia, where Bush = Hitler and the War on Terror is a "quagmire", he not only supports it, but is fighting in it. Janicki is a college professor in Mount Olive, North Carolina, and a signal officer for the United States Air Force, currently stationed in Afghanistan fighting for our freedoms. On top of that, he is also one of my point-of-contacts for [AnyAirman.com](#). This means that he registered on [AnyAirman](#) to have people like me sign up to send his unit letters and care packages, much like [Soldier's Angels](#). He then distributes those letters and care packages to the men in his unit he feels needs them. Usually, this will be the ones who get the least amount of mail.

[AnyAirman](#) is part of a larger organization called [Any Soldier](#), which was started by Sargeant Brian Horne, an Army Infantry soldier serving in the Kirkuk area of Iraq.. Similar to how [Soldier's Angels](#) was created, Sargeant Horne saw men in his unit receiving little to no support from home, and decided this shouldn't happen. So he created [AnySoldier](#) to fill this deficit while he was fighting in Iraq. Even after he came home, he continued building [AnySoldier](#), and [AnyAirman](#), [AnyMarine](#), and [AnySailor](#) soon followed.



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I found my way to Soldiers Angels after I started dating my current boyfriend, David. David is currently serving in the Air Force as military police and is a member of the Air Force Security Forces. He's been deployed to Iraq once already and is scheduled to go back again this September. When I told him of my involvement with [Soldiers Angels](#), he was like, "Wow, that's great. Do they have anything for Air Force" I was kind of puzzled, because of course I was thinking what a lot of you probably are right now – what on Earth could the Air Force be doing in the Middle East, besides being up in planes bombing stuff? Yes, my ignorance showed at that moment. David then proceeded to inform me that he had been sent to Iraq already, working alongside Army troops doing convoys and that the Air Force has soldiers serving all over the Middle East, just like the Army and the Marines. Let me tell you, I was definitely shocked. It's a running joke between me and David that the Air Force is a bunch of "pansy flyboys" because that's the impression people often have of airmen. Just like Marines are stereotyped as tough but stupid, not many people think of Air Force as tough soldiers who fight terrorists in Baghdad and Afghanistan.

Surprise, surprise – they do.

After learning this, and finding out that [Soldiers Angels](#) does not, in fact, have anything for airmen serving overseas, I decided to try and find an organization that did. Thus I found [AnySoldier](#), whose motto is "Freedom isn't free! Just ask any soldier." and lets you choose which branch you'd like to support – Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, or even Coast Guard. If you don't care which branch, and only want to support someone serving in the Middle East and fighting the War on Terror, you can do that too. You can choose which soldier will be your point-of-contact, and I chose Ted Janicki. Men and women who sign up to be points-of-contact even have an area they can sign up to write blogs about their mission, which Ted does. It was his blog that he keeps on [AnyAirman](#) that led me to choose him. I'll be posting excerpts from his blog and e-mails I have received from him at the end of this column.

While [Soldiers Angels](#) is a wonderful organization that by all accounts pioneered the effort to support our troops this way, and I encourage anyone to support our troops any way they can, I have come to prefer [AnyAirman](#). Obviously there is a little bias there for my "pansy flyboys", but all the same – I like being able to know the name of the soldier I will be supporting ahead of time. Wait time for [Soldiers Angels](#) can sometimes be days until you find out their name and address, and often that is all you find out. You are rarely given any background information or told where they are or what they do. [AnySoldier](#) gives you, in advance, the general area the soldier is in (but not the entire address of course), their rank, which branch they are in, how many men (and possibly women) are in their unit, and when they are tentatively scheduled to go home. And again, some men, like Ted, keep a running blog going on the site. After you've viewed all the information and have decided that this is the soldier you want to support, you click a button, register, and the address is automatically e-mailed to you, after you've agreed to the terms and conditions which of course include to **never** share that soldiers information and the obvious pre-requisite that this is **not** a dating site (yes, you'd be surprised).

I've learned not to expect much mail back, because frankly, they have better things to do over there than write letters. Don't think it's because they don't want to, but sometimes you have to remind yourself that hey – they aren't taking a pleasure cruise in the Bahamas. They're *fighting a war*. They honestly have more important things to worry about than writing you back the second they receive your letter. If you're lucky, they might find a spare moment. Or maybe they're lucky enough, like Ted, to be stationed at a place which has internet access. This allows Ted to e-mail me and update his blog occasionally – and getting an e-mail from him usually is the highlight of my day. But not all soldiers have that luxury.

The one thing I wonder about is how much my letters mean to those soldiers. And I often feel redundant – in every single letter I make sure to tell them how grateful I am for the sacrifice they are making, how much it means to me, and that they are heroes. I worry that it gets old hearing it, and that my stupid letters are not enough to show my thanks to these people with such courage and valor and honor to risk their lives for my freedoms. I don't worry about that as much anymore. I have faith that it means a lot to them, and I hope that, even if just for a moment, it lifts their morale. Anything I can do to thank our troops is not too much to ask. So I do encourage you, whether it is through [Soldiers Angels](#), which is a fantastic organization, or [Any Soldier](#) or one of it's' counterparts, to please sign up. There are too many of our troops who don't hear how much we appreciate their sacrifice. And that shouldn't happen. It means a lot to them, and it likewise means a lot that we know who they are. They are not faceless robots who don't think or feel. They are people, and American heroes. Were it not for them, we would not be a free country today, and we owe them our thanks. It's not too much to ask to send a letter saying that here and there, is it?

To close, I'll let Ted speak for me. As always, I welcome your thoughts.

26 Jan 2007, 11:58 am

I got your box today. Thank you. The food was all snached up in a matter of minutes.

26 Jan 2007, 3:41 am

Trust me - your notes are enough. I am just glad to see that we have some youth in our nation that are solid human beings. People that go out of their way for others. People that support the troops that are that are doing things not in the immediate vacinity. People usual only support the things that are directly related to them. Something that is more tangible. We could easily be forgotten over here. I am proud to see someone like you that I feel can be our future leaders. We are doing this for individuals like you.

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04 Jan 2007

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. Thank you for all the support during this holiday season. It truly aided us through this difficult time away from our loved ones.

14 Dec 2006

There is no doubt that security continues to be a major challenge. Remnants of the former Taliban regime and elements of al-Qaeda continue to try to derail progress throughout the country. But just five years ago, there was no formalized rule of law; there was no respected national army; there was no national police force. The nation had been wracked by war for nearly 30 years -- and was a pariah from the international community. Only three states were willing to accord the government diplomatic recognition -- and there was little order within Afghanistan. The Taliban harbored and supported al-Qaeda, the world's most deadly terrorist organization.

While it has become fashionable in some circles to call Afghanistan a forgotten war, or to say the United States has lost its focus, the facts belie the myths. To be sure, no one doubts that great obstacles still exist; the recent up-tick in violence reiterates that the enemies of a stable, peaceful Afghanistan remain persistent and motivated.

Even so, the Afghan people -- with strong support from free nations across the globe -- are building a future they can be proud of: secure and prosperous at home, and respected abroad.

06 Dec 2006

In today's age, there is often a tendency to measure progress against an unrealizable ideal, to expect development to occur in a vacuum that does not factor in preexisting conditions. It is hard to comprehend how destitute Afghanistan was in 2001, and how much progress has been made since. Afghanistan was one of the poorest nations in the world with little infrastructure; it was ruled by a vicious totalitarian regime; drought had decimated agricultural mainstays; the economy was a shambles; and decades of war had left it a broken, lawless nation.

02 Nov 2006

There was nothing easy about the two months of training we went through in preparation for our Afghanistan deployment. Blood, sweat, and tears were the norm. The high school attitude kept creeping back into my head: Why am I learning this stuff? I'll never use it in my lifetime. Now that we are in Afghanistan, I wouldn't have traded one second of that training, which is put to use on a daily basis. On one specific day, it made a real difference.

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